



# *Museum News*

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LEBBEY

SPRING 1964



## THE MIDDLE AGES

There are many definitions of that long period in European history referred to as the Middle Ages. The term is generally accepted today to mean the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the revival of letters, that is, between 400 A.D. and 1400.

Because the church was the strongest unifying force in Europe during these centuries, the center for culture and learning as well as for religion, it is natural that almost all the art produced was related to the church. Secular art was rare, and little has come down to us today.

It has not been easy for a museum founded some sixty years ago in a land which was a wilderness when the great medieval churches were built, to collect even a few fragments to represent these important centuries in European history.

The cloister arcades were acquired in 1929 and installed in the Museum's last building expansion in 1934. It was not until after World War II, in the years from 1950 to the present, that through a series of fortunate circumstances the Museum was able to acquire from such great collections as Rothschild and Baboin the beautiful and precious small objects of devotion in ivory, silver, gilt-bronze, and enamel, which have given Toledo one of the major medieval collections in the Midwest.

Unless otherwise noted in the text, all objects have been acquired with funds made available by the Museum's Founder and first President, Edward Drummond Libbey.

*Otto Wittmann, Director*

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Volume 6 (1963) is complete with Numbers 1 and 2.

EDITOR: Otto Wittmann

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Millard F. Rogers, Jr.

COVER: Cloister. The Museum cloister is composed of arcades from three places. From front to rear as seen on the cover, they are as follows: (1) From the Abbey of Pontaut (Landes), late 14th century. Marble and limestone. 31.81-89. (2) From the workshop of Cuxa, Pyrenees Region, late 12th century. Marble. 34.93 A-E. (3) From the Abbey of Saint-Pons (Hérault), mid 12th and early 13th centuries. Marble. 29.203-208. (4) Center: Marble Well-head, Italian (Venice), 13th century. Ht. 35½ inches. 36.19.



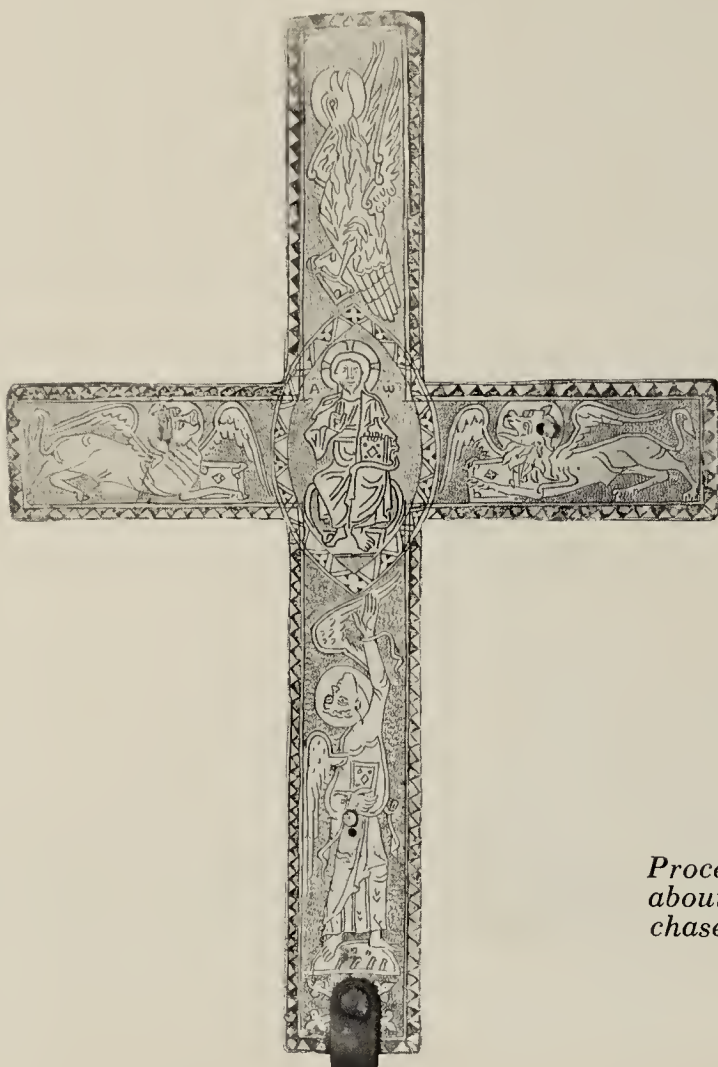
*Abraham and Isaac. Champlevé plaque. Mosan, late 12th century. 3 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Ex-colls: Spitzer, Paris; Chalandon, Paris. 50.288.*

## MEDIEVAL ART

The art of Europe between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Reformation presents a bewildering variety of styles and cross-currents of traditions. This long period was one of great economic, political, and social change in which the medieval church played a leading part. In the early centuries, Europe was absorbing the repeated shocks of barbarian invasions, each bringing with it a lively style of folk art to graft on to the solid trunk of the Graeco-Roman heritage. By the 12th century, medieval society had matured, having established its own institutions of feudalism, free cities, and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Romanesque art was the fruit of this synthesis of classical survivals and nomadic folk traditions.

Gothic art first grew as one of many branches of Romanesque, but eventually it became the dominant style of Europe until, in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Italian Renaissance transformed the attitudes and appearance of the Western World. The Renaissance distinction between major arts of sculpture, architecture, painting, and minor arts of metalwork, enameling, ivory carving





*Processional Cross. Attributed to Tirolus Iafarinus. North Italian, about 1130. Gilt bronze and copper. 14½ x 9⅞ inches. Museum Purchase. 49.16.*

and so forth, between fine and decorative art, held little meaning for medieval artists. Hence, in the study and enjoyment of medieval art, we must banish our Renaissance-inherited relegation of minor arts to a secondary place. For often they can tell us most about the spirit of the Middle Ages. Most of the items illustrated on these pages would fit on a bookshelf, but they can yield volumes if we know how to read them.

Ornamental motifs were part of a vocabulary common to all media in Romanesque and, to a lesser extent, Gothic art. We can therefore truly speak of a small metal reliquary, manuscript leaf, or ivory as monumental in the same sense as architecture, wall painting, or sculpture. The plaque of Abraham and Isaac is probably an original composition with only the most general reliance on manuscript prototypes. Within an extremely small area, it conveys an intensity of emotion not often found in paintings hundreds of times larger. The Christ on the Italian processional cross is the diminutive counterpart of the great wooden crucifixes of heroic size, some of which are still to be seen suspended over church altars.



*Lion Aquamanile. North German (Hildesheim?), early 13th century. Bronze. Ht. 12½ inches. Museum Purchase. 53.74.*

Aquamaniles were vessels for pouring water over the hands either for liturgical purification or, since medieval people ate with their fingers, for practical use. German Romanesque aquamaniles usually took the form of animals and often of lions. The one shown here is characteristically Romanesque in the way it emphasizes the power and spirit of a lion by a bold emphasis on essentials—the lively curls of the mane and the smooth strength of the flanks and legs.





*Virgin and Child Enthroned. Attributed to Bonaventura Berlinghieri. Italian, mid 13th century. Tempera on walnut. 37½ x 15⅝ inches. 36.21.*

Romanesque painting was usually part of a larger design incorporating other materials. That this Madonna and Child formed the central part of an altarpiece is suggested by the shape of the recessed arch which was probably supported by slender gilt wood columns down the sides. Such a panel would have been flanked by others of saints similarly enclosed in architectural settings, creating a solemn effect by an arcade enclosing frontally composed figures suggestive of an altar screen in a Byzantine church.



*St. John. Master of Isabarre. Spanish (Pyrenees), late 13th century. Transferred fresco. 60 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Museum Purchase. 56.15.*

This painting comes from the ruin of the small church of San Lorenzo in the Catalonian mountain village of Isabarre in the Spanish Pyrenees. Catalonia, one of the first areas of Spain to be freed of Moorish domination, was important not only for its extensive trade with Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, but also because it lay about halfway along the great pilgrimage route from Toulouse in France to the shrine of the Apostle James at Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. Thus, even the remotest Catalonian villages could boast a church with rich wall decorations in a style of primitive, forceful strength, unique in medieval art.





*St. John. South German (Strasbourg), about 1250. Polychromed sandstone. Ht. 56 inches. 48.18.*

The physical survival of works of art often involves stories of preservation in perilous circumstances, but often more remarkable are the vicissitudes of critical opinion about them. When it first came to the attention of scholars over fifty years ago, this figure of St. John was described as 16th century Italian. Subsequently it was called 13th century English and 13th century Northern French. Perhaps some great works of art have sufficiently broad appeal to make them subject to varied interpretations. It now seems clear, however, that this sculpture comes from the choir screen of Strasbourg Cathedral in Alsace, which was finished by 1252. The screen was torn down in 1682 when Strasbourg came under French rule. From engravings and drawings made before the demolition, it has been possible to identify a number of the figures of apostles and prophets, including ours, that once adorned the screen.

Made of dark red sandstone, typical of the Strasbourg region, the figure nonetheless resembles in style works from Paris and Reims, accounting, perhaps, for its earlier Northern French attribution, with which, however, the type of stone disagrees. In the transfigured intensity of the face and dramatic sweep of drapery, we can find not only a spiritual portrait of the writer of the Book of Revelation, but also a foretaste of German Expressionist art of the 20th century.



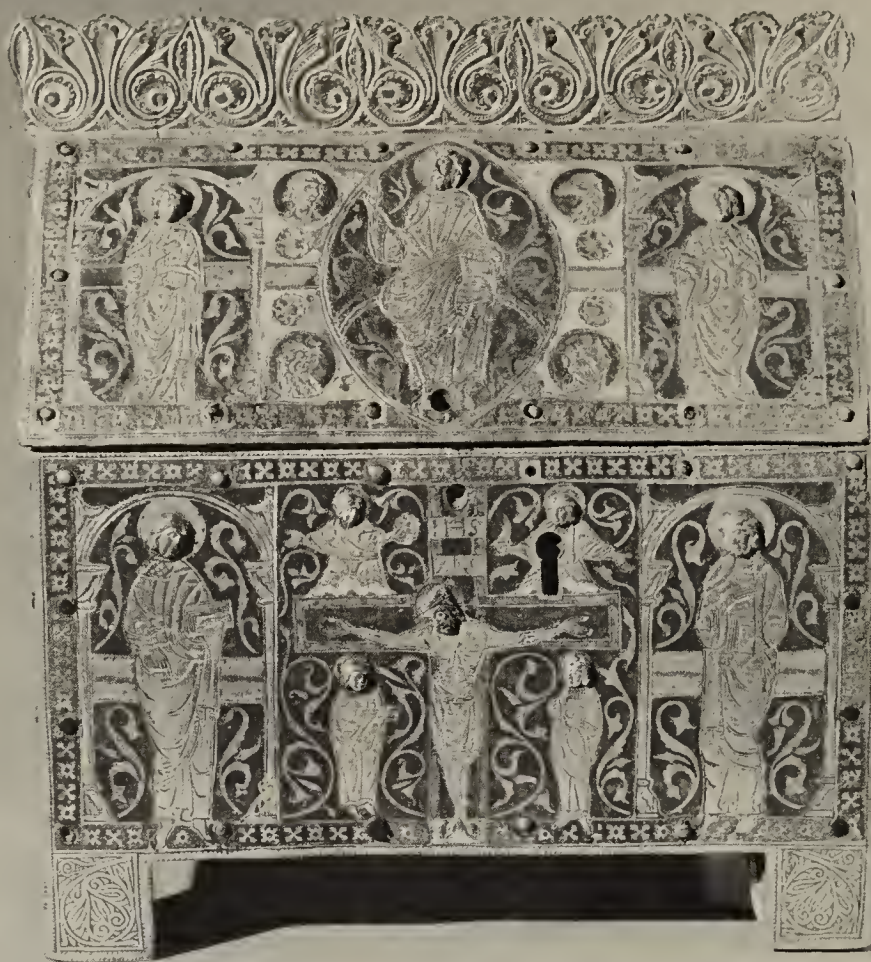


*Stained Glass Lancet. French (Paris?), mid 13th century. 80 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 23 inches. Museum Purchase. 45.23. Detail: The Last Judgment.*



With the development of Gothic architecture, walls as supporting elements almost vanished, to be replaced by partitions curtaining the space between supporting piers. These curtain walls were naturally suited to large areas of glass. The Gothic structural system encouraged the growth of numerous stained glass workshops which amounted to a major industry, just as modern office building construction has stimulated the use of plate glass for exterior walls. After the early Gothic windows of Chartres, perhaps the most famous are the tall, narrow ribbons of colored glass of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. While more modest in size, the lancet shown here is related in format and style of figure painting to the glass workshop which worked in the Sainte-Chapelle. One of the great pictorial themes developed in France during the 12th and 13th centuries was the Last Judgment, the terrors of which are graphically presented in the accompanying detail.





*Reliquary Chest. Champlevé enamel on wood box. French (Limoges), early 13th century. 7½ x 6½ inches. Ex-colls: Spitzer, Paris; Bardac, Paris; Kahn, New York. 49.36. The cresting is not original.*

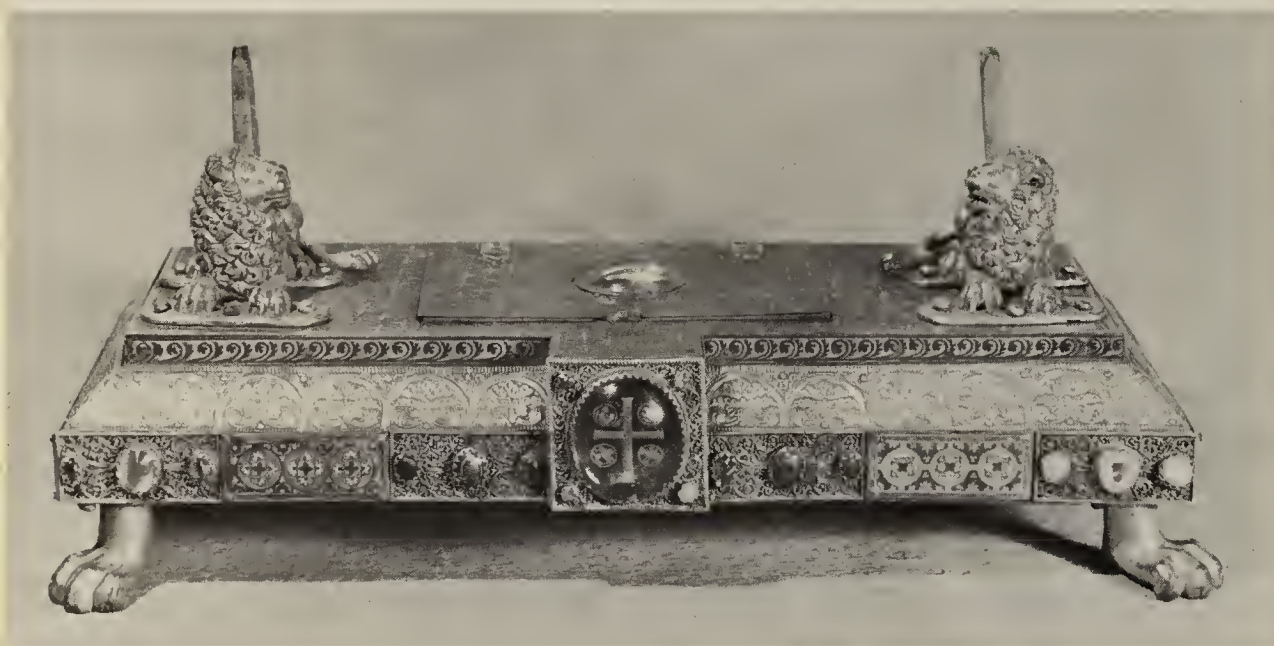
*Book Cover. Champlevé enamel on wood board. French (Limoges), early 13th century. 12½ x 7½ inches. Ex-coll: Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Frankfurt. 50.254.*

One of the major centers of medieval enamel production was Limoges, France. The demand for objects of Limoges enamel was such that by the early 13th century, mass production methods and division of labor had become standard practice. Frequently one finds identical cast heads riveted to different items and assembly marks scratched on the backs of enamelled copper plates. When quantity increases, quality usually suffers; but the Limoges craftsmen succeeded in maintaining a remarkably high level in design and craftsmanship, as attested by the objects shown here. They were helped by a conservative approach which perpetuated compositions and colors especially suited to their medium. This book cover and the casket for relics, although of the Gothic period, are still fundamentally Romanesque in form and in the simple contours of the figures.







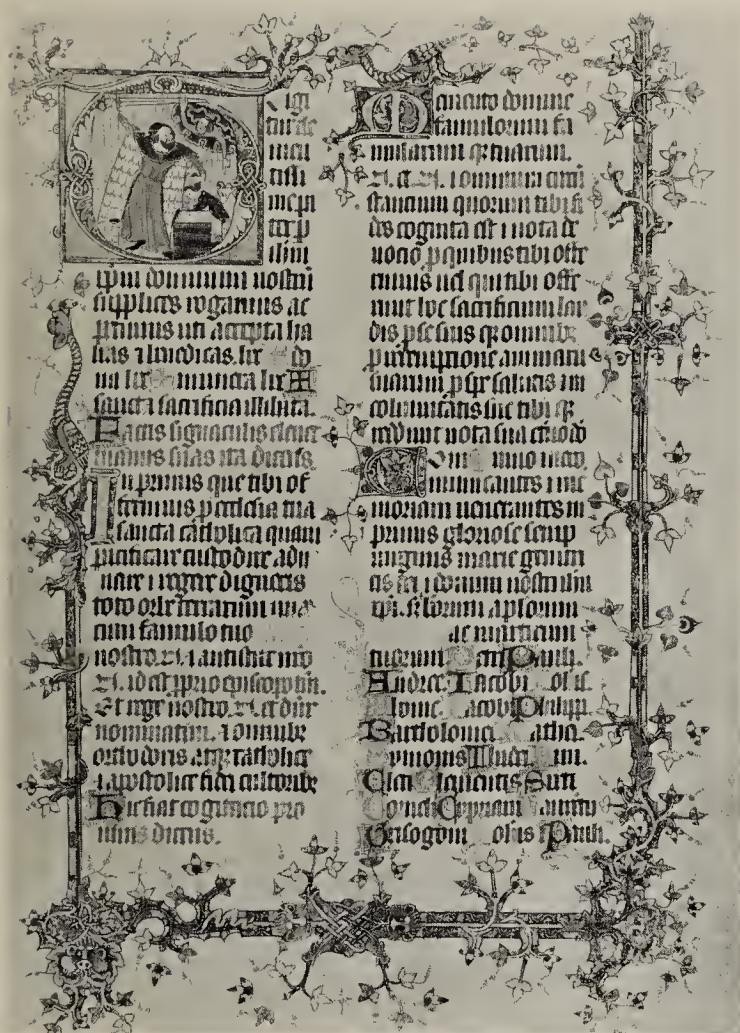


*Base of a reliquary. Gilt bronze, champlevé enamel, émail brun, silver gilt embossing and filigree, rock crystal. German (Trier), early 13th century. 8¼ x 18½ inches. Ex-coll: Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Frankfurt. 50.287. Detail: Engraved Rock Crystal with the cross and Evangelists' symbols. Lorraine, late 9th century.*

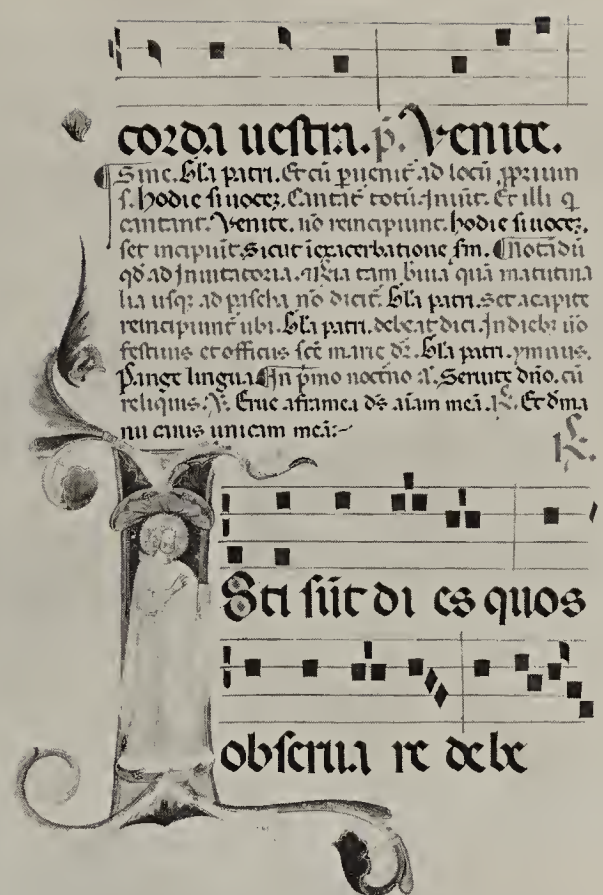
Of the few artists' names that have come down to us from the Middle Ages, a high proportion belong to the metalworkers of the Rhine and Meuse river valleys who produced shrines and portable altars of superb design and technical virtuosity.

The variety and richness of materials used in this reliquary (of which only the lower part survives) exemplify the art of Romanesque craftsmen. The alternating panels of enamel and jeweled filigree with embossed gilt arcades reveal a strong architectural sense. They suggest that the borders of ivories and illuminated manuscripts were both sources for and results of such designs. Such an interchangeability of decorative themes points up close relationships and cross influences among artists working in different media that is characteristic of medieval artistic attitudes. An interesting feature of the reliquary is the engraved rock crystal. Often Romanesque objects incorporate earlier elements either out of veneration for the thing used or admiration for its quality. This rock crystal was rightly given its prominent place on the reliquary since it is one of a small group of engraved crystals of the Carolingian period which has come down to us.





Leaf from a Missal with the Sacrifice of Isaac. English, early 14th century. 16 x 11 inches. Museum Purchase. 23.3204.



Leaf from an Antiphonal. Attributed to Neri da Rimini. Italian, early 14th century. Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum. 22 $\frac{13}{16}$  x 15 $\frac{3}{16}$  inches. Museum Purchase. 28.183.

In the Middle Ages the art of the book reached a degree of excellence rarely equalled. Books, being entirely made by hand, were scarce and expensive. The illuminators who embellished or illustrated them were often artists of major stature. Manuscript illuminations were a source and means of transmission for decorative and pictorial themes. Many ornamental borders and illustrations were adapted to use in metalwork, ivories, and architecture.

The borders of the English missal leaf shown here could very easily be translated into enamel, and the *Sacrifice of Isaac* within the initial could easily become an ivory relief. The Italian page, on the other hand, with its bolder, more open forms is evocative of architecture. The figure of the saint in the letter *I* would be appropriate in a Giotto fresco, the style of which it recalls. While North European illuminators indulged freely in populating their exuberant borders with imaginary beasts and birds descended from Celtic ancestors, Italian artists remained closer to their classical heritage. Their designs possess a sense of balance and order. This feeling for clarity is also apparent in rounder and more open script than that found in the Gothic North.





*Morse. Champlevé enamel with silver inlay and gilt copper appliques. French, mid 14th century.  $6\frac{11}{16} \times 6\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Ex-colls: Hohenzollern - Sigmaringen; Goldschmidt - Rothschild, Frankfurt. 50.248.*

A morse is a device to fasten a priest's cope across the chest. Gothic morses often take the form of the one illustrated. It is rare, however, in being inscribed (it bears the name of a presbyter, Jacobus) and in having silver inlay in the coats-of-arms on the copper enamel field. The arms with the three silver shells associate Jacobus, who is probably portrayed as the donor kneeling before the Virgin, with a pilgrim order. The other figures are Saints Peter and Paul with an angel bearing a censer above the Virgin. The theme of the censuring angel assumed increased importance in the 14th century when censuring was authorized for use in certain masses.





*Scenes of the Passion. Ivory diptych. French (Paris), mid 14th century.  $10\frac{3}{8} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Ex-colls: Spitzer, Paris; Campe, Hamburg; Baboin, Lyon. 50.300.*

*The Crucifixion. Ivory diptych wing, added gold and colors. French (Paris), mid 14th century.  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 5$  inches. 50.301.*

The Gothic ivory carvers of Paris, like their Romanesque predecessors in the Rhine and Meuse valleys, drew on the rich repertory of themes and motifs found in manuscripts, sculpture, and architecture. The Parisian school of ivory carving was pre-eminent in Europe for barely a hundred years. By the late 14th century artistic quality gave way to mere technical skills, and Parisian ivory workshops rapidly declined. The devotional reliefs shown here date from the last phase of excellence, in which ivory carvers developed pictorial themes independently of other arts and compressed a remarkable emotional intensity into a minute compass.





*St. Blaise. Silver, partly gilt. German, about 1400. Ht. 10¼ inches. Ex-colls: Spitzer, Paris; Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Frankfurt. Gift of Florence Scott Libbey. 62.68.*

St. Blaise, an Armenian bishop martyred in 316, was a very popular saint in Germany. Besides his role as an intercessor for the sick, Germans revered him as the patron of wind players because of a pun on his name with the verb *blasen*, to blow. The famous Guelph Treasure possessed a horn, called an *oliphant*, made from an elephant's tusk that was reputed to have belonged to the saint. Our figure resembles closely a wooden statuette from the same treasure, even to the simply curved horn, the shape of which resembles that of the *oliphant* of St. Blaise.

The figure is characteristic of the German silversmith's technique. It is built up out of sheets of silver hammered into shape, with only small details like the crozier head and tracery on the horn made by casting. Embroidery on the bishop's vestments has been suggested by fine engraving. The entire figure is gilded except for the face.





*Virgin and Child. French (Paris), mid 14th century.  
Ivory with silver crown. Ht. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Ex-colls:  
Bardac, Paris; Baboin, Lyon. 50.305.*

The Virgin was a favorite theme of medieval French sculptors. Parisian ivory carvers of the Gothic period produced numerous examples. The style of the mid-14th century, which represented the Virgin in a somewhat swaying pose, was admirably suited to a gently curved segment cut near the tip of a tusk. The ivory carvers liked to emphasize this curvature, for they tended to increase the length of their figures to a rather mannered extreme, thus providing space for cascading tiers of abstractly folded draperies, with only the barest reference to the limbs supporting them. The effect of ivories was often heightened by picking out details with color and gold. The diptych wing of the Crucifixion illustrated earlier retains a great deal of its color, while this Virgin bears traces in the folds of her garment of blue and red colors traditionally associated with her.





*Chalice and Paten. Sardinian (Alghero), about 1400. Silver gilt with silver basse taille enamels. Chalice: Ht. 14 inches; Paten: Diam. 11 inches. Ex-coll: Hearst. 55.223 A-B.*

In 1354, the House of Aragon took Sardinia from the Genoese, and to consolidate the conquest, settled a colony of Catalonians in the northern part of the island. This chalice and paten were probably made for the Franciscan monastery at Alghero during the period before the Catalonian colonists were absorbed by the native population. The chalice is decorated with enamels depicting the local saint, Gavinus of Torres, and St. Francis, while the paten shows the Ascension of the Virgin bordered by a Catalan version of a hymn, "The Seven Joys of Mary," and surrounded with plaques of the Trinity and Apostles.

The enamels were executed in the *basse taille* technique which involved engraving a design or figures in low relief, usually on silver for greatest brilliance. The thinly applied translucent enamels pulled away from the ridges during firing, producing highlights where thinnest and deep colors where they collected in hollows, creating an effect of depth not otherwise possible. Exact control of temperature was essential to successful execution in this difficult technique.





*Hispano-Moresque Plate. Blue and white glaze with copper luster on earthenware body. Spanish (Valencia), about 1430. Diam. 17¾ inches. Ex-coll: Spitzer, Paris. Gift of Florence Scott Libbey. 54.19.*

Islamic influences on western medieval art were numerous, but the greatest single link between East and West was the Moorish civilization in Spain. As the Middle Ages progressed, Spanish provinces were gradually reconquered by Christian princes who, until the Renaissance, showed an unusual tolerance for the large Moslem population. Moorish potters brought the art of lusterware using iridescent metallic glazes to Spain from Egypt or Syria early in the Middle Ages. The continuance under Christian rule of Moorish potteries led to the exportation of lusterware all over Europe. French cardinals, Burgundian princes, and Italian noblemen ordered tiles and dishes from Andalusia and Valencia in great quantity.

On the plate shown here is an unidentified coat-of-arms indicating that it was made for a noble patron. Such armorial plates often bear a heraldic eagle on the back, a particular feature of the bold designs found in Valencia ware. A strong Islamic element can be seen in the stylized inscriptions in rectangular fields which are purely decorative developments of Arabic calligraphy. The holes near the rim were not intended for hanging these plates as decorations, but for supporting them with pegs in a vertical position in the kiln so that a great many could be fired at one time.



From as early as the 11th century, Flanders was an important weaving center. The industry needed far more wool than could be supplied locally, so extensive commerce developed with Spain and England, the two major sheep raising countries of medieval Europe. The reputation of Flemish weavers was such that William the Conqueror and later English kings invited craftsmen from Flanders to establish weaving shops in England. The word for tapestry, Arras, which occurs in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is derived from the name of a great Flemish weaving town.

In the 15th century, Flanders assumed a virtual monopoly of the manufacture of tapestries, owing to civil disturbances and wars in France, the other great tapestry center of the Middle Ages. In an age where most furniture was portable and heating minimal, tapestries were important furnishings. They were usually woven in sets or series to adorn large halls. Actually, the word tapestry properly refers to a series as a whole, although our use of the word refers to a single panel from a series.

Usually a tapestry was devoted to a single theme drawn from mythology, legend, religion, or daily life. Each panel was devoted to one, or at most a few narrative episodes or aspects of the larger subject. In rare cases, entire tapestry sets have been preserved, but more often we can reconstruct such a set from individual surviving panels which were woven for different "copies" of the same design. Such is the case with the two panel fragments of winemaking, one of which is illustrated here. Several parts of the set have been located in other museums which enables us to determine that the series illustrated the entire wine industry from the harvesting of the grape to selling the filled barrels. The other tapestry illustrated is uncommon in that it is not part of a set, but is complete in itself. Presumably, it was not intended as a wall hanging, but as an altar frontal. The subject is not the actual entombment of Christ, but the preparatory anointing of his body before burial. As the inscriptions indicate, it was made for a family called de Mailly. The attribution of the design is based on the letters J O N seen on the left leg of Joseph of Arimathea who is removing the crown of thorns. From left to right, the other figures are St. John, the Virgin, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus. The floral background, called *millefleurs*, is typical of late medieval tapestries, and in this example one can identify daisies, pinks, strawberries, violets and phlox.

*The Entombment. Tapestry. Design attributed to Jean Fierret. Flemish (Tournai), late 15th century. 35½ x 94½ inches. 34.91.*







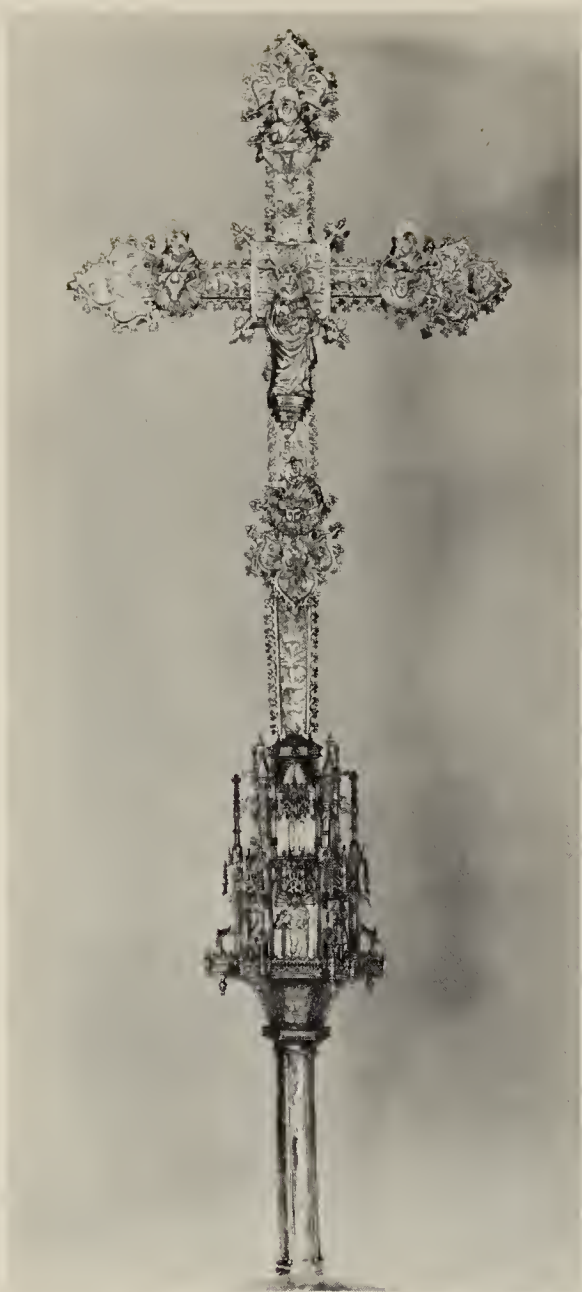
*Vineyard Scene. Tapestry. Flemish (Tournai), late 15th century. 122 x 73 inches. Museum Purchase. 49.34.*



*Covered Beaker. Silver, partly gilt, with applied enamel plaques. North German (Lüneburg), about 1500. Ht. 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Ex-coll: Hearst. Gift of Florence Scott Libbey. 61.13*

This covered beaker was made in the Hanseatic city of Lüneburg in North Germany. The enamel plaques on the feet and inside the lid bear the city arms, a matchlock musket and a crossbow. These, with the figure on top of the lid of St. Sebastian, who was tied to a tree and shot full of arrows, indicate that the beaker was made for a guild of weaponmakers. The beaker is one of a small group of late Gothic vessels in the form of a tree trunk. The stylized bark with twisting cracks and the many stumps of small branches reveals a typically German penchant for modifying natural forms to suggest Gothic decorative elements. These characteristics are effectively emphasized by gilding the smooth surfaces and leaving the textured one in plain silver, achieving a handsome balance between the contrasting "colors" of the two metals.





*Processional Cross. Silver, partly gilt, cast and repoussé, on wood frame. Spanish (Barcelona), early 16th century. Ht. 43 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Ex-coll: Rüttschi, Zürich. Museum Purchase. 62.4.*

Like much late medieval Spanish painting, Spanish metalwork has much in common with North European art, especially that of Flanders with which Spain had close commercial and political ties. For several centuries, Barcelona was a large center for the manufacture of religious silverwork, especially processional crosses, which in later examples tended to preserve a high Gothic style. Such a cross is illustrated here. Made in the early 16th century, it betrays its late date in the Renaissance style of the engraved designs on the stem and in the figure of the crucified Christ on the front. The reverse of the cross bears the Virgin surrounded by the four Evangelists with their symbols. The elaborate knop is a fine example of the architectural fantasy loved by Gothic silversmiths. In the Renaissance-style shell niches can be seen figures of the Apostles, while little dogs amusingly crouch under the roofs of the flanking buttresses.

*Rudolf M. Riefstahl*



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and Holidays



